

SECTION I. HISTORY OF THE PARK

Origins of Mission Trails Regional Park

The origins of Mission Trails Regional Park go back to 1960 when the San Diego City Planning Department prepared the report “Proposed Fortuna Mountain-Mission Gorge Metropolitan Park.” This park was to contain approximately 1,765 acres and include the most dramatic areas of Mission Gorge, Old Mission Dam, and the entire Fortuna Mountain ridge. The catalyst for the proposal was the Federal Government’s decision to release 1,220 acres of the proposed park land as surplus real property. This land had been added to the City as part of the Camp Elliott annexation and was purchased by the City

at nominal cost. Of the remaining area needed for the park, the City already owned 375 acres and the Cuyamaca Water Company controlled 140 of the remaining 170 acres.

The park concept lay fallow until 1967, when the San Diego County Planning Department prepared the “Comprehensive Regional Park Plan.” This Plan dropped the Mission Gorge area from consideration and proposed creating two separate and smaller regional parks, Fortuna Mountain and Lake Murray. Subsequently – between late 1970 and early 1972 – the County directed the preparation of the “Regional Park Implementation Study.”

This study contained the first definitive plan since 1960 of what the regional park might look like in terms of land use and design. A significant assumption was that the City would provide substantial additional open space on Cowles Mountain.

Many comprehensive park and open-space plans were prepared between 1972 and 1975. All were directed at establishing regional policies, and none significantly altered the specific direction set by the 1972 “Regional Park Implementation Study.”

Between 1960 and 1975, there was substantial urbanization around the periphery of the proposed Park.

As a result, and particularly because of public concern over the future of the Cowles Mountain area, new efforts were made to formalize the Park concept. During 1974, Cowles Mountain itself came under imminent threat of private development, and the City recognized the need to quickly and positively resolve a potential conflict between the Navajo Community Plan’s open space concepts and landowners’ development plans.

In a cooperative City-County effort led by Councilmember Jim Ellis, Supervisor Dick Brown and Navajo Community Planners President Dorothy Leonard, the County provided approximately \$2.2 million to

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purchase Cowles Mountain in 1974, in which the City subsequently purchased a one-half undivided interest. This acquisition linked the proposed Fortuna Mountain Regional Park with Lake Murray. It led the San Diego County Board of Supervisors and the San Diego City Council to adopt a high priority, jointly-sponsored approach – to develop a “Park Complex” consisting of Fortuna Mountain, Cowles Mountain, and Lake Murray. This decision recaptured the “one diverse park” concept contained in the City’s 1960 proposal, and led to a major master planning process in which the City and County decided that this park would be a high-priority area to be improved jointly.

1976 Master Planning Process

In August of 1975, the Reynolds Environmental Group was retained by the County of San Diego to prepare a Master Development Plan for the Park. This Plan – then entitled “Lake Murray, Cowles and Fortuna Mountain Regional Park” – was completed in July of 1976 and was intended to assist policy makers with key decisions regarding early implementation of the concept.

In preparing the Plan, the Reynolds Group worked closely with City and County staff, other public agencies and planning groups, San Diego State University, and the general public. An essential role was played by a 45 member Technical Advisory

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Committee (TAC) composed of representatives from the various agencies and organizations involved with planning and development programs within the area.

The presentation of the final Master Plan recommendation to the City Council and County Board of Supervisors on March 10, 1977 culminated a joint effort of the consultant team, City and County staff, the Technical Advisory Committee, and the general public. It truly reflected a process where both the land and the people – the ultimate users – were heard.

Following Reynolds' Draft Master Plan, it was necessary to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of the planning

recommendations. Thus, in February 1978, the City retained Regional Environmental Consultants (RECON) to prepare a draft environmental impact report (EIR). The City Council considered and certified this EIR in March, 1979.

Regional Park Task Force

The genesis of the Mission Trails Regional Park Task Force was the joint City Council/Board of Supervisors meeting held on March 10, 1977, to discuss the draft Master Plan and establish procedures for the acquisition of land within the area encompassed by the proposed Regional Park boundary.

Recognition of the inter-governmental complexities of

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such an enterprise resulted in the May, 1977, formation of the “Lake Murray/Cowles Mountain/Fortuna Mountain Regional Park Task Force.”

The initial composition of the Task Force was Councilmembers Mac Strobl and Floyd Morrow, Supervisors Lucille Moore and Roger Hedgecock, and State Senator Bob Wilson, under the chairmanship of Councilmember Morrow. The broad goals of the Task Force were to proceed with the adoption of the Master Plan, the acquisition of property within the proposed park, and the formulation of improvement and operation plans for the Park.

The Task Force, under the successive gavels of Supervisor Roger Hedgecock (1978), and

Councilmembers Larry Stirling (1978-1980), Dick Murphy (1980-1985), Judy McCarty (1985-2000), and Jim Madaffer (2000-2008), has since evolved into the Mission Trails Regional Park Task Force of today.

Decisions of the Task Force are final unless City Council action is required.

Citizens’ Advisory Committee

In December 1977, the Lake Murray, Cowles and Fortuna Mountain Citizens’ Advisory Committee (CAC) was established by the Task Force as an advisory body – to consider and make recommendations on items referred to it by the Task Force, to review and evaluate staff proposals, to make proposals on its own initiative, and to

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provide an additional forum for public input. Recommendations of the CAC are sent to the Task Force for approval.

The first meeting of the CAC was held on February 8, 1978, under the gavel of interim chair Henry Wilson. In May 1978, Mike Pent was elected the CAC's first permanent chair.

The Committee originally consisted of representatives from the nine affected major community planning areas and local jurisdictions adjoining or directly affected by the Park. In 1998 Dorothy Leonard succeeded Mike Pent as CAC chair.

Under the direction of the Task Force, the CAC has continued in its advisory capacity for over 30 years, recommending the

implementation of plans for the acquisition, development, operation and maintenance of the Park. In 1979, the "Lake Murray, Cowles and Fortuna Mountain Regional Park" was renamed by the CAC and Task Force as "Mission Trails Regional Park" reflecting the area's historic connection to the San Diego Mission, through historic Old Mission Dam and the flume. Additionally, the CAC established an endowment fund with the San Diego Foundation in 1985 for the benefit of Mission Trails Regional Park.¹

In 1988 three members of the CAC formed the Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation as a 501(c)(3) non-

¹ "Designated Endowment Fund Agreement Between San Diego Community Foundation and Mission Trails Regional Park endowment Fund" approved by CAC March 5, 1985.

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profit corporation. The purpose of the Foundation is to preserve, improve, develop and maintain Mission Trails Regional Park and to foster public appreciation and understanding of the Park. The three founding members, all members of the CAC, were Mike Pent, president, Jean Hatton, vice-president, and Dorothy Leonard, secretary-treasurer.

Master Development Plan Approval – 1985

A major function of the Citizens' Advisory Committee was to consider the 1976 Reynolds' study in conjunction with the EIR, and to make recommendations for a Master Development Plan. This process began in March 1979, and concluded in June 1981. Following the CAC's 1981

recommended plan, the Mission Trails Regional Park Task Force began its consideration of the overall Park and then the details for each of its five areas.

In August, 1984, the Task Force adopted with certain modifications, the Reynolds Group recommendations as proposed in the 1976 Master Plan, as amended by the CAC's recommendations set forth in its June 1981 report. In October 1984, the City retained the Reynolds Environmental Group as its consultant to incorporate the changes adopted by the Task Force. The work, under the direction of Nancy Acevedo, was managed by the City's Park Development and Open Space Division.

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The updated draft Master Plan was presented to the Citizens' Advisory Committee and Task Force in December 1984. On January 8, 1985 the CAC unanimously voted to submit the Plan to the Task Force with certain recommended adjustments.

On January 17, 1985, the Task Force unanimously approved the Master Development Plan 1985 – and forwarded it to the City Council and Board of Supervisors for consideration and adoption. On April 29, 1985, the San Diego City Council adopted the Mission Trails Regional Park Master Development Plan by Resolution No. R-263065. On June 11, 1985, the Plan was

approved by the San Diego County Board of Supervisors.

Master Plan Implementation – 1985 to 2008

Fortuna Mountain Area Land Acquisition

Both before and after the adoption of the 1985 Master Plan, which more precisely set the boundaries of the park, numerous parcels of land were approved for purchase by the City Council, using open space bond funds that had been approved by the voters in 1978. Among these purchases were over 700 acres owned by the Navy, which had been planned for Navy housing; a site east of Tierrasanta, owned by the Federal government, which at one time had been planned for a correction facility; Kumeyaay Lake and surrounding land

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owned by the City's Water Utilities Department, and several privately owned parcels just south of the SR52 right-of-way.

Hydrilla at Lake Murray

Lake Murray is a water reservoir owned by the City of San Diego. In May 1977, the State of California ordered the City to close Lake Murray to the public due to the infestation of the lake with a fast-growing, noxious weed called hydrilla. From 1981 to 1985, the City implemented an innovative and aggressive effort to successfully eradicate hydrilla from the lake. At a community picnic and celebration on Memorial Day 1985, the Lake Murray area was officially reopened to the public. The reopening permitted

implementation of the Lake Murray section of the 1985 Master Development Plan. On November 30, 1994 the lake was reopened for water related activities.

Old Mission Dam Historic Site Improvements

Funding to hire a landscape architect to design improvements for the Old Mission Dam area, a designated historic site, were obtained through the efforts of then Councilmember Dick Murphy. In 1985 Assemblymember Larry Stirling sponsored AB 77 which provided \$200,000 in State funds to accomplish the approved development. Funds were used to improve the parking area and signage, to create a picnic area, provide an

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irrigation system and water fountain, and plant native vegetation. This project subsequently received an award for historic preservation.

Cowles Mountain Staging Area

The 1985 Mission Trails Regional Park Master Development Plan contemplated that the major entry to the Cowles Mountain area would be a staging area located northeast of the intersection of Navajo Road and Golfcrest Drive. In 1985, the City of San Diego and the County of San Diego jointly developed a plan to construct a landscaped parking and trail staging area along with a comfort station at the proposed site, realign the trail from the staging area to the summit of Cowles Mountain, and develop

a view point at the summit.

The project was subsequently completed by the County of San Diego.

Lake Murray Community Park

The 1985 Mission Trails Regional Park Master Development Plan included an active recreational community park within the boundaries of Mission Trails on the northwest side of Lake Murray. In the late 1980's, two girls softball fields were built adjacent to pre-existing Little League baseball fields, along with an open lawn area and tot lot. In 1988 a tennis court complex was opened with access from Park Ridge Boulevard. Additional courts were added in 1998 and 2008. On May 17, 2003, a comfort station and snack bar

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were dedicated to serve the community park.

Visitor and Interpretive Center

The award winning Visitor and Interpretive Center, was dedicated and opened to the public on February 4, 1995 after a grand opening ceremony attended by approximately 1,200 people. This facility, which includes an exhibit area, theater, library, classrooms, office space, gift shop, and amphitheater, was a joint project of Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation and the City of San Diego. It continues to be managed and maintained jointly by the Foundation and the City of San Diego Park and Recreation Department.

Old Mission Dam Interpretive Pathway and Viewing Terrace

An interpretive pathway, completed in 1997, and a viewing terrace, completed in 1999, provides people with physical disabilities access to this area of the park. Both were joint projects of Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation and the City of San Diego.

Clairemont Mesa Staging Area

In 1998, in cooperation with the Tierrasanta Open Space Landscape Maintenance Assessment District, the Tierrasanta entrance to the park at the eastern end of Clairemont Mesa Boulevard was improved. Picnic tables, an information kiosk, and a park entrance sign were installed.

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Kumeyaay Lake Campground

Kumeyaay Lake Campground replaced an informal camping area that had existed on the edge of Kumeyaay Lake (formerly known as Hollins Lake) for many years prior to the construction of SR 52. This 46-space primitive campground was dedicated in 2000. Evening star gazing for the public is a popular activity at the campground.

Deerfield Quarry BMX Site

In 2000 an abandoned quarry pit west of the San Diego River Crossing Trail staging area was identified for relocating unauthorized BMX activity. In 2001 boundary fencing, picnic tables and an information kiosk were installed. Soil was provided by

Super Ready Mix for the creation of jumps by the BMX community. The unauthorized disturbed area adjacent to the Oak Grove Loop trail was restored in 2001.

Equestrian Staging Area

The Equestrian Staging Area, a major entrance to the Fortuna area of the Park, was dedicated on December 4, 2004. This facility was designed to meet the needs of equestrians as well as hikers and mountain bikers. The first phase of this project provides parking for cars and horse trailers, has two arenas and four horse corrals, as well as picnic tables and barbeques. The second phase of the project, once funding is identified, will include a park maintenance facility, staff office space, a large covered group

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picnic area, and a comfort station

Old Mission Dam Silt Removal

In 1988 the City obtained a one time only permit to remove silt from behind the dam to protect this historic structure. With additional build up of silt, in 1994 the City began the process of obtaining permits that would allow for ongoing silt removal. The permits were finally acquired in 2007 and 1,300 cubic yards of silt was removed in October 2007. However, permits from two of the four agencies, once again, only allowed for a one time silt removal operation. The City will need to continue to pursue permits that will allow for periodic removal of the silt build up that will continue to occur behind the

dam. In conjunction with the 2007 silt removal project a mitigation site was identified adjacent to the Carlton Oaks golf course.

Plan Update

In January 2007 an ad hoc subcommittee of the Mission Trails Regional Park CAC began the process of reviewing and updating the 1985 Plan.

This ad hoc subcommittee, chaired by CAC chair Dorothy Leonard, included former San Diego City Councilmember and Mayor Dick Murphy, former San Diego City Councilmember Judy McCarty, former City of San Diego Open Space Deputy Director Nancy Acevedo, and Senior Park Ranger Tracey Walker.